

# Escape Velocity

by ignissdio

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Summary: The crew of the Normandy try to find their way in a strange new galaxy which in many ways seems very familiar. Set after the events of ME3 and before Halo Reach.

## 1. Chapter 1

### Escape Velocity

#### Chapter 1: Escape Vector

#### Obligatory Disclaimer

I am not affiliated in any way to the companies who brought you Halo or Mass Effect.

This material is rated M for Mature Audiences. It contains violence, coarse language and adult themes.

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><p>0245 Hours, 13 November 2186<p>

High Orbit above London, England

The Normandy swept through the veil of debris building up from the damage of the two fleets ahead of them. It locked on to an unsuspecting Reaper destroyer already battered with hull breaches and scorch marks. Two disruptor torpedoes lanced out, slamming against the upper hull of the destroyer blasting off chunks of armour plating. The Normandy twisted out of arcs of return fire and replied with another salvo of torpedoes. The Reaper shuddered as the torpedoes tore through its insides, setting off a chain of secondary explosions from within. Then with a bright flurry of detonations, the Reaper destroyer died.

Inside the Normandy's cockpit, the helmsman and his co-pilot worked

furiously to evade retaliatory attacks, moving the Normandy out of Reaper firing vectors. While Joker took the helm, EDI feverishly scanned her in system reports, ship status updates and enemy movements.

"Multiple hostiles, fast attack craft on our six," she alerted Joker, "Aft kinetic barriers are taking damage—| more fighters incoming from three o'clock."

"I know!" Joker rumbled. "They're everywhere!"

The Normandy pulled a dramatic turn, pursued by a cloud of enemy drones firing upon its hindquarters. The kinetic barriers rippled a faint blue with grazing scores while GARDIAN lasers fired back, but for every drone they reduced to a cloud of helium and tangled metal, two more continued pursuit.

"I can't shake them!" cried Joker. From his peripherals, he saw the aft kinetic barriers dwindling to dangerous levels, though no matter what evasive manoeuvre he took, the drones managed to stay on his tail.

It was then that a voice came over the comms. "\_Normandy, this is the Destiny Ascension. Turn hard to your nine, now!\_"

Joker didn't have time to question this, banking the Normandy hard to port. Swarms of missiles overshot it, blooming into spheres of fire not far behind.

EDI checked the sensors. "No hostiles in our immediate proximity."

"\_We Asari pay our debts," a\_ voice said over the line

A grin spread Joker's lips and spotted a formation of dreadnoughts about fifteen kilometres directly ahead. At its lead was a familiar giant, the Asari dreadnought \_Destiny Ascension\_. Her guns bristled as it was brought to bear upon a reaper capital ship, the combined firepower of the formation of dreadnaughts smashing through its kinetic barriers and punctured the plate hull. Secondary explosions tore at its insides and with a brilliant flash of light, the Reaper broke up, its corpse left to drift in the void.

Inside the Normandy, Lieutenant Ashley Williams stood behind the helmsman and his navigator watching as the battle unfolded outside. There was nothing she could do but watch, and this ate at her. Inwardly cursing the situation, glanced at the forward view screen. On the far edge of the display behind several rows of friendly forces was the Citadel, its arms spread open and the Crucible securely docked.

She stepped outside of the cockpit and fingered her mic. "Doctor, how's Liara doing?"

The voice of the elder woman sounded over her earpiece. "Liara's doing fine, Garus too. I've managed to stem the bleeding and their conditions have stabilised."

"Thanks doc."

The line died and an awkward silence filled the air. Ashley tried to brush this by shifting to the towards the command perch behind the CIC. The terminals that lined the corridor were all manned. At the final terminal was Javik, his eyes scanning the screen.

"What are you doing here?"

The Prothean glanced at her for a second then returned his attention to the console. "I wish to know how the battle is unfolding, lieutenant. In my time, the war was lost before it had begun, but now you have a chance to break the cycle of destruction."

Ashley responded with a solemn nod. "Your kind gave us this chanceâ€| and Shepherd will end this."

The Prothean nodded. "The Reapers will end today."

As if on cue, the radio sounded, with Admiral Hackett's voice reverberating through the \_Normandy's\_ PR system. \_"All fleets, the Crucible is armed. Disengage and head to the rendezvous point. I repeat, disengage and get the hell out of here."\_

Ashley's eyes widened, suddenly sprinting towards the Normandy's cockpit with Javik following closely behind. As they arrived, they found the massive shape of the Citadel coming into view. Puzzled, Ashley found a desperate expression upon Joker's face.

"We came to get Shepherd. We will get Shepherdâ€| she wouldn't have left anyone behind."

Ashley reached for the helmsman's shoulder but was violently pushed aside. He tried again, slower and more firmly. "Jeffâ€| we need to go."

Joker froze with realisation, desperate to hold back the tears. "Damn it," he hissed beneath his breath. He took a moment to compose himself before straightening and brought the ship about. Ashley took one final look out the cockpit and found a red light glowing at the tip of the crucible. It disappeared from view as Normandy faced into space and engaged its FTL engines.

\* \* \*

><p>1534 hours, 22 April 2552<p>

New Ticonderoga, Fumirole System

"Push forward!"

With an effort, Carter emerged from cover and trained his rifle on an Elite's head and pulled the trigger. Several of the armour piercing sabot rounds stopped just before its cranium, slamming against a blue rippling shield before it failed. The last few rounds however easily pierced the light armour plating and through the Elite's skull, painting the elite next to him in a grisly coating of cranial matter. He brought his plasma rifle up to bear upon the Spartan but was far too slow, his head exploding in a hail of gunfire.

The city was like a tangled web of twisted metal as UNSC forces forged onwards. A few hundred metres ahead the massive Covenant

battle Cruiser loomed, casting a long ominous shadow over the blasted city. Just below it was a gravity lift used to transport troops and supplies to the Covenant ground forces.

Heavy plasma fire raked the encroaching human forces, the entrenched Covenant forcing the enemy through a merciless gauntlet. The superheated gas chewed through the light body armour, incinerating the marines in scores.

Above, a pair of UH-144 Falcons screamed above with autoguns blazing. Incendiary tracer rounds scoured at the stubborn Covenant forces. The ground resistance responded with fuel rod fire filling the skies with plasma. Heavy return fire forced both aircraft to break off, leaving the skies over the city uncontested.

A magazine slid from his rifle as Carter slammed a fresh one home. A stream of plasma fire streaked past Carter, instead the marine next to him bore the brunt of the plasma volley, vaporising the steel chest plate and cauterizing the chest cavity behind it. As Carter pressed forward, the enemy fire intensified, but he had no choice. From one corner of his eye, he saw the looming shadow of the massive Covenant Battle cruiser hovering overhead. From the other corner, he saw a number counting down on his Heads-Up Display.

03:52:520

03:51:016

That's when Carter's radio came alive.

"\_Commander, I'm taking heavy fire."\_

He threw a glancing backwards look and found, in the midst of a crowd of soldiers was a blue Spartan, and in the crutch of her arms was a small cylinder with a radiological warning label. The marines around her were firing into the enemy, but one by one they fell.

Carter gnashed his teeth. "Press forward, Noble Two. We're \_all\_ taking heavy fire."

Another voice cut in in the midst of the din. "\_Noble Six here. Providing cover for Noble Two."\_

There was a pause. Carter scanned the battlefield and found another Spartan forming up ahead of Kat, bearing silver armour, his rifle blazing into the enemy formation ahead. "\_Stay behind me, Kat. We'll make sure the package gets delivered."\_

"\_You better not slow me down, Thom."\_

"\_Just try to keep up."\_

Carter returned his focus ahead and squeezed off another burst drilling a neat hole through the head of the nearest grunt. His sights lined up to a leading Zealot's head when all of a sudden it disappeared in a small puff of purple blood. He lowered his rifle and pushed forward, activating his link.

"Nice shot, Jun."

A moment later, a voice replied. "\_Heads up, Commander. Two Banshees, eleven o'clockâ€¦|\_" there was a pause, and with a loud shot ringing out from a hidden position amongst the ruins, a large calibre round punched through the lightly armoured cowlings of the craft and through the head of the operator. With this, the vehicle spun out of control and crashed in a concrete pylon, erupting in a green plume.

"\_Correctionâ€¦| one banshee, closing in on Noble Two's position."\_"

02:45:061

02:44:232

With fire plasma fire closing in on Carter, he dove into the cover of a ruined building. Balls of super- heated gasses slammed into cover, vaporizing a portion of the wall. Carter pressed hard against cover and was about to bear against a squad of elites when they came under heavy fire. Three fell in the initial salvo, their shields providing little protection against the concentrated heavy calibre barrage. The rest began to flee before they too were cut down. As Carter peered out from cover, he found the imposing form of Noble 5 hunkering down amidst a pool of spent casings, training his heavy machine gun on another enemy position.

At the same time, the single surviving banshee soared overhead and began a strafing run on the approaching human infantry. Jorge brought his machine gun to bear upon the Banshee as it began to scour the advancing human forces. Armour piercing rounds tore through the light armour plating. Smoke and flames erupted near the punctured fuel tank but before the small craft could fall, it fired a final time with its fuel rod cannon. A massive explosion ruptured deep within the ranks of the advancing human advance forces a moment before the Banshee's fuel tank ruptured in a fiery green explosion.

01:47:133

01:46:511

Carter felt his jaw drop as he rushed towards the point of the first explosion. "Noble Two, do you read me? Noble Two! Respond!" Carter's heart raced within his chest. His eyes frantically scanned the field. Charred corpses were strewn about like so much chaff in the wind, most of them burned beyond recognition. "Kat! Are you there?"

As the wind blew, something in the distance caught his attention. A silver Spartan standing amidst the ruins clutching small device with radiological warnings etched on the side. At his foot was a blue Spartan with much of her armour charred black, her visor smashed to pieces. Blood began to pool beneath where she lay.

"Katâ€¦| "

"Noble Oneâ€¦| this is Noble Six. I've got the package." Before Carter could protest, Thom engaged his jetpack. As the Spartan began to ascend from the smouldering rubble with the tactical nuclear weapon in hand, his voice came over the comm a final time. "I'm ending

this."

Carter stopped, feeling a lump forming in his throat. In the end, the only thing he could manage was "Good luck, Thom."

The link died and Thom flew towards the pillar of light pouring from the Battlecruiser's underbelly. Meanwhile Carter raced towards the fallen Kat and heaved her over his shoulder. "Hold on, Kat. I'm going to get us out of here."

Kat groaned a pained reply. Carter smiled and fingered his comm as he hauled Kat over to the blasted ruins. "To any fire team receiving this transmission, this is Noble One. The package has been delivered. You have less than two minutes to fall back to minimum safe distance. If you can't make it, find somewhere to hunker down. We're going to light that cruiser up."

A moment of static filled the air before a familiar voice followed. "This is Noble Four—| shit commander, looks like Kat's hurt. I'm coming over—,"

"Negative, Emile!" Carter roared over his line. "I gave you an order, either fall back or take cover."

There was a protracted silence.

"Sir—| yes sir."

00:43:313

00:42:016

The Spartan waded through the empty ruined streets and into the blasted remains of a building looked around. On the far end was a stairwell, its walls heavy and well supported. After a moment's hesitation, Carter waded through the wreckage and carefully set Kat against the wall. He reached over and pulled Kat's helmet off. Blood trailed across her forehead and down her face. Her breath came in sharp, painful wheezes.

"How are you holding up, soldier?"

Kat managed a pained smile. "I feel as bad as I look, sir."

"In that case," he began as he embraced her tightly, "you're not doing too badly."

00:01:421

00:00:000

And then the world faded in a flash of white light.

\* \* \*

><p>0323 Hours, 13 November 2186<p>

Charon Relay, Sol Sytem

The Normandy dropped out of FTL just beyond Pluto's orbit. Inside the

cockpit, Joker scanned the in-system reports. "Charon relay detected at three-thousand kilometres. Plotting a course to the Arcturus relay."

EDI scanned her terminal display and paused. "Reports are coming in from Earthâ€¦ there is a massive energy build-up at the Crucible. Weapon firing imminent."

"Any word about Shepherd?" asked Ashley.

EDI scanned her screen. "Negative."

Joker returned his attention to the fore and saw a massive structure not far ahead, the Charon Relay. The two massive concentric circles spun wildly with several arcs of lightning ran from the massive element zero core to outbound ships before flinging them to the other side of the galaxy. One by one, they disappeared into the void until finally, the Normandy was alone.

"The board is green," Joker began, "approach run has begun." The Normandy likewise formed up alongside the Relay. Massive arcs of blue lightning jumped between the massive element zero core in the heart of the relay and the Normandy's hull. "Jumping in 3â€¦ 2â€¦ 1â€¦"

The relay jump began like any of the thousands of jumps they went through with the wash of stars blanketing the canopy like a brilliant mantle. But then a massive jolt threw Ashley and Javik off their feet and the emergency klaxons sounded.

"What's happening?" Ashley shouted.

"I don't know," Joker shot back.

The lieutenant heard the hull around her groan against an unknown strain. She tried to rise to her feet but the trembling grew more violent. For a second, Ashley thought that the tremor would rip the ship apart.

Then, with a terrible and violent crash, the crew, the marines and Ashley was plunged into darkness.

\* \* \*

><p>2133 Hours, April 27 2552<p>

Aboard the UNSC Iroquois

Somewhere in slip space

Within the stark grey steel hallways of the Iroquois, Spartan Commander Carter stood just outside the Med Bay, staring out into the darkness of Slipspace from one of the Ships view ports. There was nothing to on the other side of the transparisteel port hole, not that he was interested in anything outside. Instead, with his arms crossed over his chest, his deep blue eyes stared back at his reflection, lost in some faraway horizon.

The door behind him hissed open and an elder man emerged. He was dressed in naval officer greys with a Captain's Wings pinned upon his

breast.

As the door slid shut behind him, he smiled weakly at the larger, younger Spartan with a solemn look upon his face. The Spartan swivelled and snapped to attention.

"At ease, son."

Carter nodded.

"The Iroquois is one of the newest ships constructed by the UNSC, and for the last three days, the only thing you've seen of it is this hallway."

The Spartan remained silent.

Captain Jacob Keyes raised his gaze to meet the Spartan's. "The doctors have managed to save Katherine, but we weren't able to save all of her."

"Sir?"

Captain Keyes eased a sigh. "There's no easy way of saying this, so I'll just say it. Her arm sustained too much damage. The plasma ate right through the armour and part way through the bone. The medics were able to stem the infection but it had spread too far."

Carter's gaze fell, as did his heart in his chest.

Captain Keyes could almost sense this carried on. "Nobody's blaming you for this, least of all Katherine. You were assaulting an entrenched position against an enemy with superior numbers and firepower. You managed to pull it off."

Studying the Commander's expression, Keyes surmised that he wasn't going to convince the Spartan any other way. "When's the last time you got some rack time, son?"

Carter was unable to answer.

"I see— well Commander. I suggest you take this time to—"

The Captain was never able to finish, his voice cut off by the in-ship alert. An automated voice sounded over the comms. "Slip space jump completed. We have arrived at the Epsilon Eridani system. Distance to Reach, one hundred and three million kilometres..."

"As I was saying," Captain Keyes began but was again cut off.

"Receiving priority one broadcast from the UNSC Savannah."

Both men sprinted to the nearest console where a video feed began to play. The other captain was younger than Keyes, his face void of blood.

"\_This is Savannah actual. We have detected atmospheric entry above the equator on the dark side of the planet. Impact detected around the five hundred kilometres north of New Alexandria. We are scrambling fast response teams to investigate."\_



Jacob chanced a look at the Spartan from the corner of his eye and found the otherwise stoic warrior taken aback at the news.

"\_All military assets have been raised to Defence Condition Two. All incoming forces are to assemble near Anchor Nine."\_

"Commander," Jacob finally said, straightening himself out and turning his attention to the Spartan. "Assemble the remaining member of Noble Team at the HEV pods, prepare for atmospheric deployment. I want your team to head the investigationâ€¦ if the Covenant has discovered Reach, then they'll need all the help they can get."

Carter blinked and nodded an affirmative. He turned marched away leaving Keyes to himself. The man returned his attention to the screen, which was now displaying several reports from the planet. His eyes turned towards one report, displaying suspected entry trajectories.

"This can't be," he gasped as he noted that. Whoever this was, managed to bypass the nuclear mine field laid out in high orbit above the planet. He also noted that none of the planetary sensors detected the incoming vessel until it was finally inside the atmosphere.

And then he froze.

In the far corner of the screen were visuals from one of the Orbital Defence Platforms of the vehicle entering atmosphere like a flame wreathed comet amidst the darkened background. He fingered the console and brought the image up. The display zoomed in at the head of the comet and clarified the image.

His mouth dropped as he read the words etched on the craft's side.

"Normandy."

\* \* \*

><p>AN

I've remade the fic for two reasons. A lot has changed since I originally posted. On Mass Effect's side, they released the extended ending which, in my opinion, was an improvement on the original. Also, Halo 4 came out and with it was a lot of new material.

Also, from the original fic, there was a lot of feedback that I took on board. Granted, I did not know much about the Halo Verse back then, and I still don't know much now. I'll do the best that I can to bring you a half-decent fic.

Again I apologise and I hope you've enjoyed this fic so far. I'll try to bring out more stuff sooner.

## 2. Chapter 2

### Escape Velocity

## Chapter 2: The Visitors

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><p>The night sky above Reach was peaceful, the heavens painted with a brilliant mantle of stars dusted above a dark shade of azure of the nebula beyond. Situated near the system's asteroid belt, the planet is regularly privy to light shows as asteroids entered the planet's atmosphere and burned up streaks of light.<p>

Four such shooting stars illuminated the upper atmosphere, composed of steel and ceramic, each containing within its protective shell a Spartan. As its undercarriage sizzled white hot, the most each Spartan could feel was the slight shudder of turbulence.

In one of the HEV's Carter eyed the viewport as the dark outline of the planet below grew beneath him. His eyes then turned to the small screens on either side of the viewport. To the two o'clock position was Jorge, to his five and seven was Jun and Emile. All of them were silent; each of them listening to what little intel came through the radio.

"â€| \_has designated the vessel as the Normandy. Its hull configuration is unlike anything we have ever seen before. Human, Covenant or otherwise. The writing on its side suggests that the vessel is of human origins, but we're not going to take any chances. More puzzling than its origin or shape are its capabilities. It didn't set off any of our alarms before it hit the atmosphere. No gravimetric fluctuations or slip space ruptures associated with vehicles coming out of FTL, and no RADAR, LADAR, infrared or UV signatures detected. It managed to bypass the nuclear minefield without triggering a single sensor."\_

\_ "Damn," \_Emile retorted over the radio, shaking his head, \_"we could use something like this."\_

The voice on the other end continued. "\_â€| fast response teams have established perimeter one kilometre from its radius, mainly comprised of marines and ODSs. Additional Spartan forces are en route but you will be the first on the scene. Your mission is to confirm the occupants of the Normandy and secure the vessel. The UNSC Grafton will hold its position two kilometres from the crash site, and the Savannah to the south, just in case fire support is needed. Good hunting Spartans. Iroquois actual out."\_

The radio died, leaving the Spartans to themselves as their drop pods hurtled through the lower atmosphere. "Thoughts?" Carter offered.

Jorge leaned in closer. "Says here that t\_he UNSC Normandy was a

destroyer that was lost in the battle of Alpha Aurigae, commanding officer was one Captain Ronald Drake."\_

Emile scoffed. "Looks to me that the \_Normandy\_ is pretty much intact, and seems far too small to be a destroyerâ€| a corvette maybe."

"Do you suppose there are humans in there, Commander?"

"Well, Noble Five," Carter began as the ground quickly came up on screen, "we can ask them when we get the chance."

The ground erupted in plumes of dirt and smoke, small impact craters forming where the HEVS embedded themselves into the soil a short distance from each other. One by one the pods' canopies were jettisoned and one by one the soldiers climbed out. As Carter hauled himself out, he retrieved his rifle from the small arms compartment and scanned his HUD.

"Crash site is half a click to our south. Time to introduce ourselves."

\* \* \*

><p>"Uggh."<p>

A cry of pain knifed through the darkness like a sabre, drowned out by panicked screams and shouting.

"Unngâ€| aaaahhh!"

There is a sound of something struggling in the darkness. A brief electrical spark illuminated the figure of Jeff Moreau curled upon the floor of the Normandy's cockpit, clutching his shoulder, writhing in pain. Embedded in his chest is a large piece of glass from a shattered terminal protruded like the hilt of an icy dagger from his bloodied fingers.

"Nnnghâ€| "

For several moments there is only the sound of his shallow pained breathing as he tried to remain conscious. An eternity goes by before, with one final agonised effort, he is able to pull it free, bringing with it the sickening sound of sinews tearing as the final length of red-soaked glass slides free from his chest. It fell from his grip, a numbing warmth traveling the length of his spine as the life fluid begins to gush from the wound.

Jeff placed a hand over his chest, applying pressure to the wound and struggled to his feet. The injured helmsman glanced to his side at the chair adjacent to his. EDI likewise lay still, her eyes open wide but lifeless. The injured helmsman turned from the cockpit and began to make his way down the corridor when his legs gave way and he stumbled, crying out as he hit the floor a second time.

He glanced up and found, in between electrical sparks and flashes of torches, the crew scrambling around attending to the wounded. The hallway was ruined, exposed cables hung from the ceiling and the deck was carpeted by broken glass. Joker tried to call out for help but finds blood at the back of his throat. His world began to darken and

he felt his heart slowing in his chest.

Then, as sight slowly gave way to darkness, he could almost swear that he heard something calling out to him. It was Ashley.

"Joker? Joker! Oh shit, he's bleeding! Get doctor Chakwas! Oh God!" she lunged over to Joker and placed her omni tool hand over the open wound. The device activated, a bright orange interface came to life. Ashley fingered a number of keys and the slight hiss of medi-gel being administered, the salve filling up the wound. Ashley half expected Joker to jolt with the initial sting of the antiseptic but the helmsman lay still, his chest barely rising with each breath.

It was then that she saw that she heard a voice coming through her line.

"\_This is Commander Carter of the UNSC to the unidentified space craft. You have entered a restricted area. We've got artillery zeroed in your position and if you do not state your identity and purpose, you will be fired upon. "\_

\* \* \*

><p>"This is Commander Carter of the UNSC to the unidentified space craft. You have entered a restricted area. We've got artillery zeroed in your position and if you do not state your identity and purpose, you will be fired upon. "<p>

Releasing the button, Carter waited but silence answered him. He took his time and scanned the stricken vessel. Everything suggested that the design was human, but it was unlike anything he had ever seen before. Four proportionately oversized nacelles and the sleek designs suggested an emphasis in speed rather than firepower.

He began to reach for his comms again when a voice came on line. \_"Commander Carter, Do you copy? This is the Systems Alliance frigate Normandy. We have suffered catastrophic systems failure and a number of my crew are hurt bad. Are you there? Requesting immediate aid. Please!"\_

The Spartan reached for his comm relay when he felt a hand fall on his shoulder. It was Jorge, and he was shaking his head. "What if it's a trap?"

"What if it's not?"

"Commander, we're here to-"

"I don't have time to argue, Noble Five!" Carter growled, shrugging off Jorge's hand. "You and Jun, fall back to the tree line and back us up. Emile, you're with me."

Emile pumped his shotgun and nodded. "Right beside you, Noble One."

As Jorge reluctantly moved back towards the tree line, Carter reached for his comms, first changing the frequency. "Grafton, this is Noble One, are you getting this?"

"Loud and clear, Noble One."

"Send Pelicans to our position, possible medical response required."

\_"Roger that, Noble One, medivac pelicans inbound-" \_

"Grafton-," Carter cut in, "maintain yellow alert. Keep our position painted. We have not, repeat, we have not yet confirmed friend or foe."

"Acknowledged, Noble One. Over and out."

Carter switched the frequency back. "Normandy, this is Noble One. Medivac inbound. I am on site, ready to provide assistance."

There was a tentative pause.

"I hear you, Noble One. Opening port airlock."

A loud pneumatic hiss sounded over the side of the Normandy as the pressure seal of the airlock broke off. The bulkhead slid open a strange figure emerged, stepping out into the grass below. A woman. She wore a strange azure armour, the battle plating stained deep crimson. As she looked up she paused as if caught by surprise by the massive figures with guns in their hands.

This moment lasted just one heartbeat before her gaze hardened. She inspected both of them in turn before finally fixing her attention on Carter. "Noble One, I presume?"

Carter nodded. "What's the situation?"

"We've got four wounded, one critical. Our systems are down and we cannot treat their wounds locally. We're applying field treatment but if he doesn't get to a medical facility-"

"ETA on medivac is one minute. Do you need help evacuating the ship?"

She shook her head. "No. We've got this." She reached for her earpiece. "Vega, bring them out, help is on the way."

At once, Carter saw men being stretchered out of the airlock. Most of the men wore the same configuration of armour as the woman, azure hard suit with white stripes running along the side with a stylised A above the right breast. They moved and acted more like disciplined soldiers than zealous rebels insurrectionists.

From his side, he noticed Emile eyeing talking to one of the soldiers when a strange thing came to view from the airlock. Unlike the others, this one wore a strange red armour of ancient design, his head insectoid with two pairs of eyes. Carter froze for half a second with a hundred thoughts running through his head. From his peripheral, he saw the barrel of a shotgun rising as Emile trained his weapon upon the creature's head.

"What the fuck is that?" Emile screamed, throwing a glancing look at Carter who by now also had his rifle pointed at the alien.

Carter felt his finger tightening around the trigger. "Ashley, you

have five seconds to explain yourself."

"Javik is an ally," Ashley responded, "he is not an enemy, we are not your enemies but if you pull that triggerâ€¦"

"Are you threatening me lieutenant? Do you know what kind of shit you're getting yourself into?"

The tension was broken as a line cut in with a voice over his radio. \_"Noble One, this is Noble Actual."\_

Carter's finger just stopped short of the trigger. "I read you, Noble actual."

"Stand down, commander. We do not want to start another conflict if we don't have to. The Savannah and the Grafton are deploying pelicans to secure the areaâ€¦ we will be moving the Normandy and her crew to Sword Base for further investigation. Is that understood?"

He investigated the creature a final time before replying. "Yes."

"Please confirm that this is understood, Noble One."

"I understand."

The radio cut out and Carter reluctantly lowered his rifle, turning a frigid glare at the human lieutenant. The whirr of jets grew louder as the incoming Pelicans made their final approach. "Lieutenant Williams, you've got a lot of explaining to do."

\* \* \*

><p>1630 Hours May 2 2552<p>

Sword Base, Badab Ice Shelf

Three days had passed since a mysterious ship was taken into Hangar Four, locked under the pretence of quarantine. Since then, the hangar has come under heavy guard, a brigade of marines assembled around its doors, knowing only that what is inside must be kept inside. For three days the base was kept under heightened alert, kept under the careful watch of the fleet amassed above in orbit.

On the ground, several scientists were locked inside the hangar, investigating every aspect of the mysterious ship and its crew. Standing atop the observation deck, the elderly Catherine Halsey inspected readings from across her station monitor as reports came flooding in. A hushed whooshing of sliding doors revealed an elderly man with a silver oak leaf insignia on his right breast.

He inspected the improvised lab and shakes his head in disapproval, wandering inside. "What made you choose my observation deck as your lab, doctor?"

"I like the view," Catherine replied, "It addsâ€¦ perspective to my work."

Catherine briefly glances to her side and found the Colonel peering down at the ship below. "What do we know about our guests?"

The woman paused and turned her attention to him. "They have been cooperative. We've learned a great deal about them. Is there anything in particular that you want to know?"

He gazed a moment longer, inspecting the ship. "Where are they from?"

Catherine sighed and pulled up a file to her terminal. "When we brought their systems back online, we managed to gain access to their flight data records and corroborated the crew's reports."

Holland's eyes narrowed, his voice rising. "That they are what? From Earth circa 2186? Is that even possible?"

Catherine rose from her seat walked over to the glass. "There are more things in heaven and earth than there are dreamt in your philosophy."

The Colonel remained eerily silent.

"There can be a great number of possibilities, Colonel. Temporal distortion, dimensional breach, we don't know just yet and there is a very likely possibility that we may never know. I think the more important question is can we trust them?"

Colonel Holland sighed and crossed his arms. "Contact protocol with a new species, doctor: Assume hostility unless proven otherwise."

"So we shall tar them with the same brush as the Covenant?"

"Fact remains, doctor, we don't know much about them. To me, the human among them are just as alien as the others. The Office of Naval Intelligence expects us learn about them and we will base our opinions and decisions on those same facts."

"You mean the facts that I find, Colonel?" countered Halsey. "Yes Commander, we base our decisions on facts. Fact is they are not Covenant. Fact is their technology is fantastically different to ours. Fact is they don't know how to get back. Fact is they need us. These facts point to one obvious conclusion, Colonel: we need them."

"Is that your professional opinion?"

She nodded sharply. "Yes. It is"

Holland smirked and returned his gaze downwards at the ship moored below. "I will take your opinion under advisement, doctor. I must admit however that it may take some time before I can trust theseâ€| guests. It's a hard to ignore what happened the last time humanity found that it wasn't alone."

\* \* \*

><p>Sometime laterâ€|<p>

Far below the hangar, beneath several hundred feet of steel, dirt and ice, a figure akin to an apparition walks a dim hallway in utter silence save for the echoing of her footstep resonating in the

darkened sterile void. What little light there was shone off against her pristine white naval officer's uniform.

She paced down the hallway with a vacant glance, her long auburn hair bobbed up and down in a neat pony tail behind her. Marines lined the hallway, saluting her as she passed. Finally, she stopped at a massive bulkhead. Her deep green eyes noted a security panel to the right.

It scanned her as she approached. "Colonel Alice Sinclair."

An affirmative beep echoed down the steel hallway. The heavy steel portal clanked loudly as the magnetic lock released and the whir of gyros signaled the opening door. The chamber inside was dark at first, lit only by walls of computer terminals. Alice stepped inside and the doorway shut almost immediately. The darkness gives way to light outlining a massive cylindrical vial that runs the height of the room from floor to ceiling. The tube was lined with six inch thick bulletproof glass.

Inside the tube, suspended by cables and wires was EDI, the android stationed aboard the Normandy. Data siphoned from the platform registered on the nearby computer screens.

On the far end of the room stood Colonel Urban Holland studied a report.

"Colonel Sinclair, have you had a chance to talk to our visitors?"

"Is that what you're calling them now? \_Visitors\_?" she retorted icily.

Finally, Holland turned about and noted the other. "What else should we call them?"

"They are, in every sense of the word, alien." She approached the glass and inspected the facial features of the android. "Some of them \_may\_ look human, but they are not one of us. They cannot be trusted. Not yet."

"I've spoken at length with Doctor Halsey on this subject. She would disagree with your assessment... with our assessment."

"There is no doubt they can be useful," Alice conceded, "we can learn a lot from these aliens and that is why the Office of Naval Intelligence has established the Alien Cooperative Under Military Authority. ACUMA will have two purposes. The first is to determine if they posses technologies to help us defeat the Covenant."

"And the second?"

Alice smiled coldly. "To see if they can be trusted."

\* \* \*

><p>AN

Hello. I hope you've enjoyed this chapter. It is notably slower paced than the first, I really wanted to establish some of the hurdles



these two factions would have to overcome before they can work together.

I've begun to add original content in this chapter. While you will be hearing more about ACUMA/ AKUMA and Alice, I will try to keep the focus on established characters.

To those worried about the tech-discrepancies, I'm going to try to work some magic between the two. As a spoiler, I aim to meld the technologies together. Rest assured that the Normandy and her crew will be making a significant contribution to the war effort WITHOUT being buffed or made overpowered. What fun would that be?

Finally, I would like to apologise if I make UNSC personnel seem apprehensive around the Normandy crew. I figured that they've just been presented with a lot of unknowns which will generally get people nervous.

Also, thank you for the reviews. I have made amendments where I found them.

End  
file.